WHIRRAKEE

January/February 2003 Vol. 24 No.1

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.
Address for correspondence: PO Box 396, Bendigo 3552
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Office Bearers for 2002 - 2003

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Senior Vice President	Matthew Comer	46 Railway Place, Goornong	5432 2380
Junior Vice President	position not filled		
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Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $34; Family $40; Concession: Single $28.50; Family $34. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $34. These rates include GST.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The invited speaker at general meetings starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper.
If a workshop is held prior to the meeting, it will be advertised and it usually starts at 7.00pm.
The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 7:30pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearers listed above, together with the following members: Barbara Pelczynska, Bob Ruddick, Maurie Stone, Stuart Fraser.

Excursions Excursions are conducted irregularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. In addition to local excursions, campouts are held several times each year, usually coinciding with long weekends or holiday periods.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has two active sub-groups:

Fauna Study Group: meets on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7:30pm in the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building.
Chairman: John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane, Mandurang (5439 5710)
Secretary: Bill Holsworth, 13 Nabilla Crs., Bendigo (5443 4063)
Equipment Officer: Maurie Lewis (0407 427179)

Bird Observers Group: meets on the first Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm in the Golden Square Senior Citizen Building.

Front Cover: Photographer: Stan Pelczynski / Trish Pilling

This photo was to appear on the back page of the December Whirrakee, in conjunction with....yes, it was Stan on the front page, not Father Christmas, but somehow the back page dropped out in the printing process. So here then, you can see another tireless BFNC garden worker. Who is it? The first correct entry gets a chocolate bar.

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club

Vol. 24, No. 1, January/February 2003

Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*) which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

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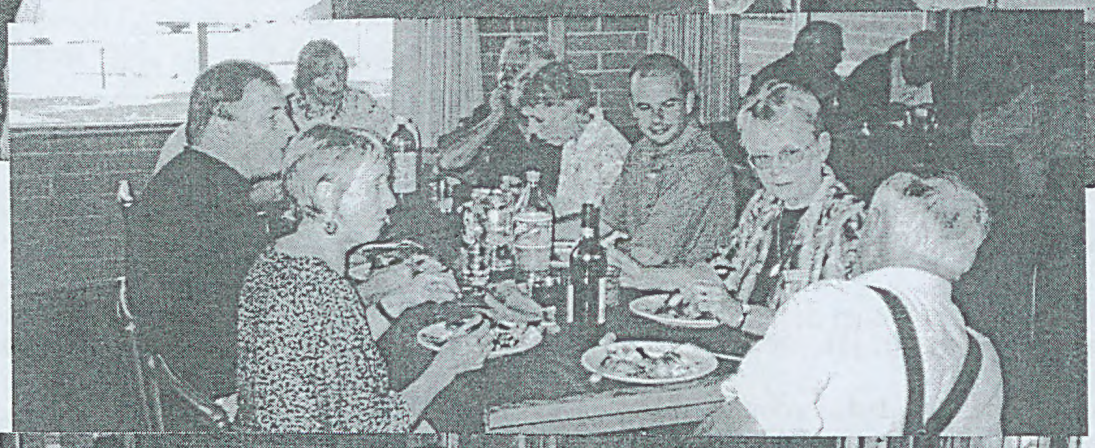
Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles.
Contributions will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although articles received more than one week after the monthly General Meeting will probably be too late for inclusion in the next issue of *Whirrakee*.
Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's note
A very happy new year to everyone. I was ever so grateful to Kerrie Norris for providing me with Pam Land's article for this edition as traditionally, we have to scratch around to fill this one, while Australia is still in its big summer sleep. As it is we have only a thin edition but you will all have had an interesting holiday and have a story to tell now, so please send it in!

For our **Christmas dinner**, most of the familiar people were there but were all the important ones there.....?
All present are showing various degrees of hunger, amusement, interest and pain (?)... so see if you can find yourself...if not, consider coming to the next general meeting and meet some of us so that by the end of the year you'd want to come and have dinner with us!



Spotted Quail Thrush Observation
by Neil Maling

On an evening walk with the Benigo Outdoor Club on 13 November in the forest between Spring Gully reservoir and Tannery Lane, we observed a Spotted Quail Thrush.
It was sighted in typical Quail Thrush habitat, stony outcrop, fallen limbs and forest litter. After a few minutes it walked quietly away into cover.

My OBP experience
by Pam Land

This article, courtesy of B.O.C.A., recounting Pam's experience with Orange-bellied Parrots in Tasmania, was printed in 'The Bird Observer' vol.817, p.8-10.

In August 2001, John and I received by mail, a newsletter, *Volunteer* from the Threatened Bird Network (I think we must have been added to the mailing list after attending a Swift Parrot workshop). In it we read of the Orange-bellied Parrot Recovery Program an a request for volunteers, two at a time for two week periods, between October and March in tasmania. We thought it sounded interesting and worthwhile so I rang the contact number. We felt lucky to be allocated a fortnight that suited us, 9-23 January 2002 at Birch's Inlet, approximately 45 km south of Strahan.

Before long some written information arrived in the mail. It described the hut we were to stay in, and access to Birch's Inlet: 'Birch's is accessed by a 7.4m catamaran from Strahan to the landing in the Birch's river Travel time is highly variable depending on harbour conditions, from 50 minutes to 2 hours, 30 minutes. The trip can sometimes be very rough. In the Birch's River, gear and people are transferred to a small dinghy for another 300m trip up the creek. From there it is a short walk to the hut.'
It went on to say, 'Because weather conditions can be variable and the boat may not always be able to travel on the harbour, there may be delays getting to and form Birch's. Volunteers need to be flexible in their travel arrangements in case of delays. Apart form emergency evacuation by helicopter, boat is the only way to exit Birch's back to Strahan. Walking out is not an option.'

Also mentioned was the fact that tracks are often boggy, and that gumboots are useful. It told us that the Birch's River area is often subject to heavy rain, hail and strong winds, that river and moorland water levels can rise quickly and that when sunny, there is little shade. March Flies are prolific and extremely annoying, as are sandflies and mosquitos it warned, so bring repellent and some soothing lotion to cope with bites.

We were told we must pack to enable all our gear, food, etc. To be carried in wet weather and be easily transferred from the catamaran to the dinghy (three containers each for the fortnight). All rubbish must be retained, well secured from wildlife and brought out at the end of our stay. We were also given some information on what our duties would be, a bit of background onteh Orange-bellied Parrot Program, a hut inventory, a list of suggested gear, and told a little about the Bird's River area. It all sounded quite different from anything we had done before, and I began making lists of things we would need.

As the time for our departure neared, the packing began in earnest - three containers each? With sleeping bags, gumboots, warm coats, raincoats and trousers, gaiters, thermal underwear (we had been warned and advised), books, torches, cameras, binoculars, clothes and food? Well, what a challenge - but we did it! Thank goodness, we thought, that it rains a lot over there, and we don't have to take water.

On January 8 we arrived in Strahan on schedule, to stay overnight at the Parks and Wildlife Service flat. We were welcomed by the Ranger, told we must radio in every morning at 9.30, and instructed on the use of the two-way radio. She asked us to be at the PWS depot at 10am, where our car would be stored, and from where our adventure would begin.

We were loaded into the catamaran, with our six manageable containers of gear, alongside with the co-ordinator of the Orange-bellied Program, Mark Holsworth, a co-worker Dave, and their gear. The boat was still on its trailer and we rode through the streets of Strahan to the boat ramp. We had a smooth and lovely trip across Macquarie Harbour, transferred without mishap into the dinghy, and were pleased to find a wheelbarrow at the landing to help us take our six containers up to the hut.

Mark and Dave set to work straight away and invited us to accompany them to inspect nest boxes. These are checked at least twice a year. They are cleaned out about September, before the birds start breedig, and again about January, to check for chicks and other contents (Tree Martins, Common Starlings and feral bees, in that order, seem to be the most common occupants). On reaching each box, dave scaled the tree with the aid of ropes and abseiling gear, to check for OBP chicks or clear out the box. Any chicks found in the boxes are carefully brought down, leg-banded, weighed, measured and returned. A blood sample is also taken for DNA testing and identification. Clutches range from two to six; three to four seems to be most common.

Just getting from one box tot eh next is very difficult and time-consuming, but these guys didn't dilly dally. They trudged through the boggy, soggy, slippery, wet, muddy, unstable buttongrass plains and the densely vegetated hills with ease. They are used to difficult terrain, I guess, but for folk like us, more comfortable on the dry, dusty, solid, stable, more even and open areas of central Victoria, it was hard going.

Mark and dave stayed overnight in the hut with us, and we all went out again the following day to complete the checking of nest boxes. The researchers performing the se tasks spend long hours 9often in wet and unpleasant conditions) carrying out their duties. On this occasion four or five nest boxes were found to have chicks in them and naturally, the more chicks discovered, the longer the job takes.

The objective at Birch's inlet is to re-establish a breeding population of Orange-bellied Parrots there. At the moment, Melaleuca, in far south-west tasmania, has a population of about two hundred of these birds living a relatively safe existence Up until the mid 1980s there was also a breeding population at Birch's Inlet. A combination of lack of firing of important feeding areas and competition for nest hollows from introduced European Starlings are thought to be the reasons that the OBPs left Birch's Inlet. It is considered important that there is more than one breeding population to protect the parrots against catastrophic events such as bushfire or disease, which could wipe out the entire population at Melaleuca. Birch's Inlet was identified as the best site for a re-introduction program using captive-bred birds.

During summer, the OBPs live on the open coastal plains of south-west Tasmania. They feed on seeds of various plants on the buttongrass plains and nest in the hollows of trees in adjacent forest areas. In late March, after the breeding season, OBPs fly, via various Bass Strait islands, tot heir winter feeding grounds along the coast of Victoria and eastern South Australia, from as far as Corner Inlet to Lake Alexandrina, near Adelaide.

Historical information suggests that OBPs, in fluctuating populations, have been in these areas since at least the first European settlement. 'Thousands of them' were reported in the 1930s, 1880s and 1910s. There appears to have been a dramatic decline in their numbers since the 1940s, but the population seems to have stabilised at their present low numbers from about 1975.

The program at Birch's Inlet has been going for seven years of more and captive-bred OBOs are now breeding there. There are two large aviaries, each housing a breeding pair of 'call birds', which entice released birds to settle in the area. Also near the aviaries is a feed tray, cleaned and supplied each day with a small amount of seed. This is a sort of half-way house for recently released birds. It also provides a good monitoring spot so that (though the telescope) feeding bird scan be identified by their leg bands. This information along with flight path routes, is recorded by volunteers like us to help the researchers. Volunteers also care for the aviary birds, watch nest boxes to identify parents, record weather information and keep the hut clean and tidy.

We weer lucky that, after the first two or three days, the wet, drizzly weather cleared and after a week of sunny weather, the boggy, soggy, wet, muddy buttongrass plains dried up considerably and made walking about easier and more enticing.

Much of our time was taken up with our monitoring duties, and in our spare time, we didn't venture more than one and a half hour's walk from the hut. As the crow flies, that was only 2.5km, but the tracks are winding to avoid wet and boggy terrain and the densely vegetated areas. There was plenty to see and do in that area, so much of interest: pademelons, dragonflies, possums, spiders and their webs, frog calls, mosses, the changing light on the mountain, butterflies, lizards, birds....

We walked one day along the Low Rocky Point Track (relic of mining and lighthouse supply days) to where it crosses Birch's River. We sat for a couple of hours to watch the birds. A Dusky Robin sat in the dead branches and moved from tree to tree, or tree to ground and back. We saw a Bronze-Cuckoo, but were unable to ascertain which species. A New Holland honeyeater was flitting amongst the trees, and the Striated Field-wrens and southern Emu-wrens were a delight, moving through the low vegetation and alighting at the top of plants to sing for us. The plants along the track were lovely too. There were many more than we could recognise, but the *Utricularia dichotoma* (Fairies' Aprons), *Xyris operculata*, *Patersonia*, *Melaleuca*, *Bauera* and *Leptospermum* in flower were a very pretty sight.

As you may have guessed by now, our two weeks at Birch's Inlet were very special (we took lots of photos!), and the Ground Parrots calling at dusk were just magic.

Our bird list for the two weeks at Birch's Inlet

Pacific Black Duck
Great Cormorant
Swamp Harrier
Latham's Snipe
Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo
Sulphur-created Cockatoo
Green Rosella
Orange-bellied Parrot
Blue-winged Parrot
Ground Parrot
Fan-tailed Cuckoo
Dsouthern Boobook
Azure Kingfisher
Southern Emu-wren
Tasmanian Scrub-wren
Scrub-tit
Striated Field-wren
Tasmanian Thornbill
Yellow-throated Honeyeater
Crescent honeyeater
New Holland honeyeater
Dusky Robin
Grey Shrike-thrush
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Black Currawong
Forest Raven
Beautiful Firetail
Welcome Swallow
Tree Martin
Common Starling.

The editor of 'The Bird Observer' noted the following at the end of the article: Orange-bellied Parrots disperse during the non-breeding season to saltmarshes and coastal pasture and shrublands. Their feeding-grounds in western Victoria and eastern South Australia may be affected byt he installation of wind-farms (refer to "The Bird Observer' vol 816, p 31.)

Plants and Animals of the Box-Ironbark Area of Central Victoria

A very short review by an inexperienced user....

Being a Macintosh user, I only spend a short time on a PC to try out this new CR Rom but I got completely carried away by the ease of use and the possibilities it offers to the interested person.....here are some examples:
Say, you have just been on a walk and saw a Bluebell but did not know what species. On the maps in this CD, you can find where you walked down to a 10km^2 section and find what bluebells are known from there. There are good photos which accompany most species which is a great help for the identification.
You can search areas of any size, get the plant or animal species listed (by common or scientific name, with photos). The maps you would search from can be topographical maps, rainfall maps, Landsat images, maps showing towns and roads or public parks and conservation areas.
You can also search areas on these maps with filters imposed to narrow the resultant plant or animals lists. For example you may only want to know what plants flower in December or which ones have been used by aborigines or which species are in your area from a particular group like honeyeaters, frogs or eucalypts.

You can also start the other way round, pick a plant or animal and find out where, in Central Victoria, it can be found, again in relation to the various types of maps mentioned above.

I believe that this new CD is going to be a great tool for serious researchers and field naturalists but even for the not-so-serious, it is a lot of fun just to browse around in. A good way to learn about our local flora and fauna.
I did wonder, at times, about the completeness of the lists that went with an area but I suppose that is what Bill Holsworth is talking about on the next page with phase 3 of this excellent project.

The CD-ROM Project. --- What Is Next and Will You Do It?

By Bill Holsworth, Secretary for Phase One of the Project.

The launch, on December 6 2002 in Castlemaine, of the CD-ROM Plants and Animals of the Box-Ironbark Area of Central Victoria, by the mayor of Mt. Alexander Shire, marked the end of the first part of a major co-operative project of the Bendigo, Castlemaine and Maryborough Field Naturalists Clubs. The three clubs organised donations from local and state government agencies so that we could contract Viridans Biological Databases to produce a CD-ROM to our specifications.

The Project started in August 2001 with a few meetings to decide what we wanted and how we could raise $20,000. By July 2002 we were able to give instructions to Viridans Biological Databases to begin the final preparation of the disc and we began to plan the launch. Representatives of the 10 sponsors, the appropriate local and state government officials, and most of the members of the Field Naturalists Clubs were invited. About 80 persons came to the Castlemaine Botanical Gardens, listened to the speeches, enjoyed morning tea, and bought the CD,s. It was a successful launch of a successful project. **Phase One** of the project is now completed.

We must now begin with the most important aspects of the project: **Phases Two, Three**, and **Four**. Three Committees should run these three activities in parallel. The knowledge, background, and type of involvement will involve both members of the Clubs and groups and persons outside the Naturalists Clubs. Initially the Project has about $2,000 to fund these activities, but more grants might be available when programs are developed.

Phase Two: Sales

This has progressed well with about 120 copies sold. Most sales have been direct to Government Agencies and Club members but we expect that this portion of the market will soon be saturated. The next market groups will be the secondary and high schools, and LandCare-type groups. The **Sales Committee** will organise the packaging and mailing the CD's, ordering additional stock, maintaining records, and distributing CD's to retailers, etc. The Committee members will not need to meet very often or know the technical details of computers or plants and animals, but they will need to have good administrative skills. Ideally the committee members should be members of a Field Naturalists Club, and should be located in the major regional towns.

Phase Three:

The **Naturalists Committee** will manage the acquisition and correction of data that should be on the next revision of the CD. Members of the committee should be competent naturalists with expertise in some of the plant groups or animal groups. They will also need to help organise field trips and excursions with specific objectives relating to data acquisition and confirmation of records. Not all members of the Committee need to be Field Naturalists Club members. Ideally this will be a very large group with many experts having detailed taxonomic or ecological knowledge. This phase will be on going with no end-point. Hopefully many Naturalists will use the CD and the excursions to develop their competence and thus become "experts".

Phase Four:

The Education Committee will also be on going, but some achievable end-points are possible. It may be desirable to have two committees: one for public education and one for school education. We need to get the Education Department to develop a Curriculum Unit for using our CD and similar products. This does not mean that we should develop the Curriculum Unit, rather that we should be a lobby group to show the Education Department that a Curriculum Unit (at several levels) is desirable. Demonstrations to schoolteachers, conservation groups, and public workshops, etc. should be seen as part of **Education** and not a **Sales** activity. Obviously members of this committee should have a background in school teaching or public education as well as some competence with computers and understanding of natural history.

The CD-ROM **Plants and Animals of the Box-Ironbark Area of Central Victoria** is available to Club members at $45.00 (plus $5.00 postage and packaging for each order). The price to the public is $49.95 (plus p+p if required).

VFNCA March Long Weekend Camp March 7 – 11, 2003
Urban Camp Melbourne

Expression of Interest Registration Form
Please circulate widely

Draft Program subject to change. Prices are approximate at this time.

Friday	Afternoon – Bureau of Meteorology Training Centre, Broadmeadows Registration from 4pm at Urban Camp Evening – Welcome, Speaker
Saturday	Full Day - Zoo and behind the scenes approximately $13 Evening – VFNCA AGM 5 pm, Speaker from Zoo.
Sunday	Optional - Aquarium and brief behind scenes approximately $17 and/or Point Cook Wetlands Evening – general meeting if necessary. Speaker
Monday	Botanical Gardens with Friends of the Gardens Evening – Speaker
Tuesday	Morning – Museum of Victoria – behind the scenes and self-guided museum tour approximately $15

Accommodation
Urban Camp – Fully Catered, shared rooms. Approximately $50.00 per day per person
Located in Royal Park, parking available. Public Transport to most venues close by.

A letter with final details will be sent in early January to those who have registered.
Final payment will be due at the end of January.

A deposit of $20.00 per person is required with the expression of interest. Payment made payable by cash/cheque at Ballarat campout or cheque by post. Cheques to be made payable to BFNC Camp Account.

Enquires to Rob and Glenise Moors Ph 03 54396254 or email clachan@impulse.net.au

Please complete below and send deposit prior to 13th December

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Expression of interest - VFNCA Camp March 7 – 11, 2003.

Names_____

Address_____

Phone _____ Email _____ Club_____

Payment of_____

Return to: Rob and Glenise Moors
555 Mandurang South Rd
RSD STRATHFIELDSAYE
Victoria 3551

Diary

The General, Bird Observers Group and Fauna Study Group meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

General Meeting

Wednesday, February 12 7.30pm
In the first meeting for the year, all members are invited to bring slides along.

Bird Observers Group
This group meets (in the clubrooms) on the first Wednesday of the month at 7:30pm. The next meeting is on:

Wednesday, March 5 7.30pm
Topic: determine future focus, excursions and/or projects for the group to pursue.

Fauna Group
This group meets in the clubrooms) on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm. The next meetings are on:

Wednesday. February 26 7.30pm
Planning projects and reports

Wednesday, March 26
Eastern Barred Bandicoots - Kerrie Norris

Wednesday, April 23
Echidnas - Glenise and Rob Moors

Wednesday, May 28
Bees - Ian Fenselau

VFNCA March Long Weekend Camp
March 7 – 11, 2003
Urban Camp Melbourne

for details and expression of interest, see page 8 in this edition..

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.
W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals.
It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Natural Resources and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.

WRIN News

On Saturday April 5th 2003, WRIN will be having the 'bat lady' herself, Lindy Lumsden coming to Bendigo to give a talk on her favourite subject. The talk will start after the WRIN meeting which commences at 1pm and will be at your club rooms. I'm sure I don't have to write up any details on Lindy, I think you all know her well. We will be charging $2 per person to help cover costs. Tea and coffee will be available after the talk